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WORKS OF THE IMAGINATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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THE Bible is a marvel of literature. It is the book of God containing a divine revelation to mankind. It is also the book for man, in which devout souls in all ages guided by the divine Spirit have drawn near unto God, and have opened up the paths to the divine presence. The Bible contains codes of law, but it is not a law-book for ecclesiastical lawyers. The Bible contains statements of doctrine as bright as the rays of the sun and as clear as a mountain brook, but it is not a system of theology for dogmatic divines. The Bible contains laws and doctrines, but it also contains more than laws and doctrines. It gives a divine revelation for all classes of people, for all races, and for all nations. It is for the merchant and the physician, for the father and the mother, the young man and the maiden, the child and the peasant; and therefore it approaches all these classes of people in the way in which they can be reached.

Accordingly, the Bible has been given to men in the varied forms of the world's literature. The Bible is largely composed of History. But this history is written chiefly in the popular style, where the imagination prevails over the logical arrangement of facts and words. If Biblical history had been written for the scholarly historian, doubtless it would have been composed in an entirely different way. It would have told us more that the historian desires to know. To the professional historian Biblical history is quite disappointing, for it is silent about those things he needs to investigate, and gives the most of its space to matters that have little attraction for him. Biblical history was written for the instruction of the people of God in all ages. It is not the history

of the world of Israel, but the history of Redemption. It is evident that it has accomplished this purpose. Biblical history is the most interesting, charming, and attractive in the world, because it is a history for God's people, to instruct them in the story of God's presence, and His redemptive working in the world.

A second great division of Biblical literature is Prophecy. This may be compared with the oratory of other nations. Much of it was oral. But a large portion of it was written for reading and not for speaking. The prophets are not easy reading. They are difficult, partly because the circumstances of their writing are not familiar to us. They address men and women in another age than ours, and in different conditions and circumstances from those familiar to us. It is hard for us to get into a condition in which their address will seem appropriate to our age and its affairs. A large portion of Hebrew prophecy is, and must be, for most moderns of little practical importance. But there are portions of the Hebrew prophets which are read with great delight in all parts of the world, and by all classes of people; these are those in which the imagination reigns, painting with delicate touch, with masterly outline, and with glowing colors, the sublime scenes of the Messianic future. It is the imagination of the prophets that makes them the religious instructors of mankind.

A third great division of Hebrew literature is Poetical Literature. This embraces a collection of Lyric Poetry,—the Psalter; a collection of sentences and poems of wisdom,—the book of Proverbs; a collection of dirges,—the book of Lamentations; and three elaborate pieces,—the book of Job, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. The three last named are not collections, but rather pieces of composite poetry of a more artistic kind than anything found in the three great collections.

The Psalter and the book of Proverbs show us the wondrous poetic insight and the matchless grace of composition of the Hebrew poets. The historical books contain many beautiful poems. Another collection as large as the Psalter might be gathered by bringing all these scattered pieces together in one book, embracing such interesting poems as the sword-song of Lamech, the stories of the creation and the deluge, the epic of the fall of mankind, the birth-song of Sarah, the blessing of Jacob,

the ode of the Red Sea, the songs of the ark and of the fountain, the predictions of Balaam, the blessing of Moses and his song of prophecy, the ode of Deborah and the hymn of Hannah, the dirges of David over Jonathan and Abner, and very many others. Every variety of lyric and gnomic poetry is here represented. No ancient nation can present more splendid collections of poetry than those contained in the Bible. The Psalms are the most familiar lyrics in the world, the sentences of the book of Proverbs are the maxims which outshine the ethical precepts of the sages of Greece and of Rome, of Egypt and of India and of China.

The three great pieces of composite poetry rise to greater heights of poetic art. (1.) *Job* is a gnomic, didactic drama, presenting a combination of poetic skill that is unique in the world's literature, only approached in modern times by Goethe's *Faust*, which indeed was modelled after it. The older writers thought that *Job* was prose and the story historical, but it is now conceded that the book is a masterpiece of poetry, and it is commonly recognized that the story of *Job* in whole, or in part, is a work of the imagination. The book gives us a prose prologue stating the problem, to test the integrity of *Job*, by means of afflictions directed by Satan. The lower stages of the affliction are rapidly sketched. The poem then describes the temptation of *Job* by his three friends, ancient types of Pharisees. The conflict with them is in three stages in which *Job* rises higher and higher in his religious experience, until he grasps a solution of the mysteries of human life which his Pharisaic friends never dreamed of. They are silenced; and *Job* gives his grand discourses on victory. The discourses of Elihu, whether an episode, introductory to the theophany, or a later addition to the poem; and the discourses of God, in which the wonders of creation and providence are described as nowhere else in the Bible—all contribute to the solution of the same problem of human suffering. The whole concludes with the submission of the God-fearing *Job* and the rewards of his victory. Here is a drama of human experience under divine discipline, human persecution, and Satanic temptation, which is a masterpiece of literature as well as a marvel of grace. The ideal features of the poem as a work of the imagination have greatly increased our appreciation of it. The older divines could not understand the book when they viewed it as his-

tory and as prose. The youthful and conceited Elihu was praised above Job by some of them, as if he were a type of the Messiah, or the Messiah himself; the errors and crudities of the friends of Job were often taken as the truth of God, and so those ancient Pharisees became the perpetual triers of the patience and piety of God's people.

(2.) *The Song of Songs* has been the most abused of all the writings of the Old Testament. Its poetic features were not recognized until recent times. Its divisions in the Authorized Version and the Revised Version are bad. The arrangements of chapters are wrong. The headings of the chapters are misleading. It was for centuries interpreted as allegorical and Messianic, and in later times as typical. No wonder that many discarded it from the canon, and regarded the reading of it as unprofitable. As the climax of the sins against the book, it was rendered, in many verses, in indelicate and immodest language. There is not an immodest or impure word or thought in the book from beginning to end. If correctly rendered, the purest-minded may read it without a blush. Modern scholarship finds in this book a drama of love, five acts of an operetta, each act having its refrain. In it are solos, duets, trios, responsive choruses, and a dance.

The Song of Songs is the drama for women as the Book of Job is for men. The Shulemite, a rustic maiden of northern Palestine of wonderful beauty, affianced to a shepherd whom she dearly loves, has been enticed to the pavilion of Solomon, in northern Palestine. Here the court ladies and Solomon unite in their efforts to make her forget her shepherd and give her love to Solomon. She is taken to Jerusalem, and every effort is put forth at the court of the great monarch by sensuous temptation, by enticing flattery, by brilliant promises, and even by love philanders, to win her love for Solomon. She is exalted in praise and honor above his concubines and queens. But all this extraordinary temptation fails; she is faithful to her lover, and conquers by the simple and irresistible energy of her own purity and virtue. She is permitted to return at last to her mountain home, leaning on the arm of her beloved. The drama closes with her song of the triumph of love and with the marriage feast. This drama of love is a gem of poetic composition—the purest, the sweetest, the noblest, of all the poetry of love. If love is holy and Christian—

and who can doubt it?—no piece of poetry has a better claim to be in the canon of Holy Scripture than the Song of Songs.

(3.) *The Book of Ecclesiastes* is the most difficult book in the Old Testament. It is also a work of the imagination. The traditional theory that it was written by Solomon in his old age is scarcely worthy of mention at the present time. The book has the latest form of the Hebrew language known in Holy Scripture, and if there is any such thing as a history of the Hebrew language, the book was one of the last in composition in the Old Testament. Its position in the development of the Wisdom literature is also late. This book is another struggle with temptation and a victory. Job gives us the victory of a pious man over external temptations and trials. The Song of Songs gives us the victory of a virtuous maiden over all the attacks of the greatest and noblest monarch of the times upon her honor. But Ecclesiastes gives us the victory of the sage who triumphs over internal soul-conflicts and trials. It is a battle in the soul between skepticism and faith, agnosticism and the fear of God. There are two sides of the soul's experience, the dark side of doubt, and the bright side of piety. These come in regular succession in the book until the victory is gained. The difficulty in interpreting the book is in distributing the material between these two sides. Those who take the expressions of the book on its dark side and use them as the truth of God are really perpetuating and unfolding errors which are exposed and removed in the brighter pages of the book. No one can use the book with profit who does not possess the key to its interpretation. It is dangerous to use the two-edged sword of its skepticism and the keen arrows of its doubt, unless one understands the analysis of the book and so is able to turn these weapons of agnosticism by the shield of Koheleth's own heroic faith and the well-tried armor of his sublime reverence of God.

We have thus far considered Hebrew history and prophecy, and have seen the remarkable play of the imagination in these forms of sacred literature. We have also seen the wonderful development of the imagination in Hebrew poetry in various forms of lyric and gnomic poetry, and in the three great poems of the imagination, setting forth, in the measures of composite poetry, in the combination of the dramatic with the lyric and gnomic elements, the three classes of temptation which assail man-

kind. This rich development of the imagination among the Hebrews raises the question whether there may not also be in the Bible prose works of the imagination. There has been a great reluctance on the part of pious people to recognize such forms of literature in the Old Testament. But an increasing number of scholars find several such works of the imagination among the Old Testament writings. We shall approach the question by working back to it in the lines of the history of Hebrew literature.

(1.) Works of the imagination play a very important part in Hebrew literature outside the Old Testament. The Haggadic literature of the Hebrews, used chiefly for the instruction of the people in the synagogues and in the schools, was largely composed of such writings. Rabbis used parables, stories, and legends of every variety of form and content with the utmost freedom, in order to teach doctrine and morals, and even to illustrate and enforce the legal precepts of the Jewish religion. Jesus, in his teaching, used the same method. His numerous parables have never been equalled for their simplicity, beauty and power. No human imagination has ever equalled the imagination of Jesus in story telling. The Prodigal Son, Dives and Lazarus, the Good Samaritan, the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Talents—are masterpieces of art. No historic incident, no individual experience, could ever have such power over the souls of men as these pictures of the imagination.

(2.) The apocryphal literature has many such stories, which have been the favorite themes of art in all ages. Judith and Holofernes, Zerubbabel and the king of Persia, the Maccabee mother and her seven sons, Bel and the Dragon, Tobit, and Susanna, are sufficient to remind one of them. These writings are all regarded as canonical in the Roman Catholic Church. Luther says of Tobit: "Is it history? then is it holy history. Is it fiction? then is it a truly beautiful, wholesome, and profitable fiction, the performance of a gifted poet."

Who can doubt at the present time that these are all stories invented by the imagination of the authors? They were written in order to teach important religious lessons.

There are no *a priori* reasons therefore why we should not find such prose works of the imagination in the Old Testament. We should not stumble at such literature even if the idea be new to us or repugnant to us. If we have poetic works of the imagination in

Job, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, why not prose works of the imagination? If Jesus used imaginary scenes and incidents in his parables, why may not inspired men in times of the Old Testament revelation have used them also?

A careful study of the literature of the Old Testament shows that we have at least three prose works of the imagination in the Old Testament, all written in the times of the restoration.

These are Jonah, Esther, and Ruth.

(I.) *The Book of Jonah* is inserted in both the Hellenistic and the Rabbinical Canons among the minor prophets. And yet the book does not contain discourses of prophecy as do the other minor prophets. If the book of Jonah were history its place ought to have been among the historical books. It is among the prophetic writings with propriety only so far as the story which is contained in it was pointed with prophetic lessons; and for this prophetic purpose it is immaterial whether the story is the real of history or an ideal of the imagination.

The reasons for regarding the book of Jonah as essentially an inspired work of the imagination are these:

(1.) It was not the aim of the writer to write history; the story is given only so far as it is important to set forth the prophetic lessons of the book. There are two scenes, the one on the sea, the other at Nineveh. The story begins abruptly; it closes abruptly after giving the lessons. The transitions in the story are rapid flights of the imagination, and not the steady flow of historical narration.

(2.) The prophet Jonah is mentioned in the history of the book of Kings, and a prediction of minor importance is mentioned as given by him. It seems very remarkable that the book of Jonah, on the one hand, should omit this ministry in the land of Israel, and on the other hand that the author of the book of Kings should give such comparatively unimportant ministry and yet pass over such important prophetic ministry as that given in the book of Jonah.

(3.) The two miracles reported in Jonah are marvels rather than miracles. There is nothing at all resembling them in the miracle working of the Old Testament or the New Testament. They are more like the wonders of the Arabian Nights than the miracles of Moses, of Elijah and Elisha, of Jesus and the apostles. It is true that there are great sharks in the Mediterranean Sea

which are said to have swallowed men and horses and afterwards to have cast them up. But this being so the chief difficulty remains. How do we explain the suspended digestion of the fish for such a long time, and the self-consciousness of Jonah while in the bowels of the fish, as indicated by his prayer? But even if we could overcome these difficulties by an unflinching confidence in the supernatural power of God to work any and every kind of miracle, the most serious objection would still confront us. It is not so much the supernatural power in the miracle that troubles us, as the character of the miracle. There is in it, whatever way we interpret it, the element of the extravagant and the grotesque. The divine simplicity, the holy sublimity, and the overpowering grace which characterize the miracles of Biblical history are conspicuously absent. We feel that there is no sufficient reason for such a miracle and we instinctively shrink from it, not because of a lack of faith in the supernatural divine power of working miracles, but because we have such a faith in God's grace and holiness and majesty that we find it difficult to believe that He could work such a grotesque and extravagant miracle as that described in the story of the great fish.

So the story of the wonderful growth and withering of the tree is more like the magic of the oriental tales than any of the Biblical miracles. It seems to be brought into the scene as an embellishment rather than for any real purpose of grace. A careful study of the miracles of Holy Scripture excludes this magic tree from their category, and, to say the least, puts it in a category by itself.

(4.) The repentance of Nineveh, from the king on his throne to the humblest citizen, the extent of it, the sincerity of it, the depth of it, are still more marvellous. Nineveh was at that time the capital of the greatest empire of the world. It was a proud and conquering nation, least likely of all to repent. The history of the times is quite well known, and the history makes such an event incredible. Some have endeavored to minimize the repentance as a mere official one, such as were ordered by monarchs during the middle ages. But these apologists forget that, according to the story, God recognized the sincerity and the extraordinary character of the repentance. God granted His grace and recalled His decree of destruction on that account. This repentance is a marvellous event. Nothing like it meets us in

the history of Israel or the history of the church. Is it not an ideal of the imagination? Jesus uses the story of the repentance of Nineveh to shame the unrepenting cities of his time. There was no historic repentance so well suited to his purpose.

(5.) The prayer given in the book is not suited to it, if the story be historical, but it is entirely appropriate if it be regarded as ideal and symbolical. The prayer is a piece of poetry of two complete strophes concluding each with a refrain, and then half a strophe without a refrain. This shows that the prayer is only a part of a longer piece which must have been complete and symmetrical as we see from the parts given to us. This prayer is a mosaic from several more ancient psalms and prophecies. It is older than the book of Jonah, and has been used by the author as appropriate to his story. This prayer is the prayer of thanksgiving of a man who either in fact or in figure has been drowned in the sea. He has gone down to the bottom; the sea-weed is wrapt about his head; he has then in his departed spirit gone down to the roots of the mountains, has entered into Sheol, the abode of the dead, and has been shut up in its cavern by the bars of the earth. His deliverance has been a resurrection from the dead.

Such figures of speech to represent great suffering of an individual, or of a nation, are found in the psalms and the prophets. Hosea uses the same figure of speech for the exile and the restoration: "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death." Isaiah and Ezekiel also represent the restoration as a resurrection from Sheol, the abode of the dead, and the rising up of the dry bones from the battlefield of the slain. Now if the descent into the belly of the fish, the abode therein three days, and the casting up again is simply a poetic symbol—is a devouring of Israel by the great sea monster Babylon; if the author had in mind the words of Jeremiah—"Nebuchadnezzar hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out" (Jer. li., 34); and if he is thinking of Hosea's words: "After two days he will revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him" (vi., 2); then it would be appropriate for him to use in the song the symbol of death and resurrection as a parallel to that in the narrative, of the swallowing by the fish, abiding three days in the fish, and casting forth by the fish. The prayer strongly urges the symbolism of the story.

(6.) It is objected that Jesus in his use of Jonah gives his sanction to the historicity of the story. But this objection has little weight ; for we have seen that his method of instruction was in the use of stories of his own composition. We ought not to be surprised therefore that he should use such stories from the Old Testament likewise.

It is urged that Jesus makes such a realistic use of it that it compels us to think that he regarded it as real. But in fact he does not make a more realistic use of Jonah than he does of the story of Dives and Lazarus.

Paul makes just as realistic a use of the story of Jannes and Jambres withstanding Moses ; and compares them with the foes of Jesus in his times (2 Tim. iii., 8).

And Jude makes just as realistic a use of Michael, the archangel ; contending with the devil, and disputing about the body of Moses, and compares this dispute with the railers of his time (Jude 9).

These stories used by Paul and Jude are from the Jewish Haggada, and not from the Old Testament. No scholar regards them as historic events. If apostles could use the stories of the Jewish Haggada in this way, why should not Jesus use stories from the Old Testament ? Jesus uses the story of Jonah just as the author of the book used it to point important religious instruction to the men of his time. Indeed Jesus' use of it rather favors the interpretation of it as symbolic. For it is just this symbolism, that the fish represents Sheol, the swallowing up, death, the casting forth, resurrection, that we have seen in the story of Jonah interpreted by the prayer, which makes the story appropriate to symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus.

For these reasons the story of Jonah is commonly regarded by modern scholars as an ideal story, a work of the imagination.

We have now to inquire what was the great lesson the book of Jonah was designed to teach. There are, indeed, two lessons, one in each scene of the story. The first part of the story teaches the lesson of Amos (ix., 2-3):

"Though they dig into Sheol, thence shall mine hand take them.
Though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down,
And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and
take them out thence.
And though they be hid from my sight, in the bottom of the sea,
Thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them."

It is also similar to the lesson of the Psalmist (cxxxix., 7-10):

“ Whither shall I go from thy spirit ?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there :
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold thou art there :
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
And thy right hand shall hold me.”

God has power to bring up from the depths of the sea, from the womb of Sheol, from the belly of the fish, those who turn unto Him, to His holy temple. Israel's calling as the prophet of the nations cannot be escaped. He may be overwhelmed in the depths of affliction ; he may descend into Sheol, the abode of the dead ; he may be swallowed up by the great monsters who subdue the nations—but God will raise him up, restore him to life, and to his prophetic ministry. Jonah, Pharisaic Israel, may renounce his high calling and perish ; but a second Jonah, a revived and consecrated Israel, will surely fulfill it.

But the greatest lesson in the story is in the repentance of Nineveh, and the attitude of Jonah toward that great event. Jonah again represents historic Israel, preaching with sufficient readiness the doom of the nations and watching for the *Dies Iræ* when that doom would be fulfilled. Jonah goes out of the city and selects a good place from whence he may see the grand sight the overthrow of the capital of that nation, which was the greatest foe of his people. But Jonah does not represent the ideal Israel. God has other views than Jonah. He does not look with complacency upon the death of 120,000 babes who do not know enough to do right or wrong. He does not delight in the death of men, but rather in the repentance of men. A million or more human beings gathered in Nineveh, that great capital of the ancient world, cannot perish without giving sorrow to the heart of God. Jonah may delight in such a scene, God cannot.

The repentance of Nineveh changes all. In an instant the decree of destruction is annulled, and divine grace triumphs over the sentence of judgment. This author caught such a wonderful glimpse of the grace of God to the heathen world, that it makes the book of Jonah a marvel in the doctrine of the Old Testament. Jonah was ready to die with mortification that his own preaching had been successful. He wanted the destruction of Nineveh,

not its repentance. He was willing, like some moderns, to preach as a witness, to testify against sin and proclaim the wrath of God. He could not understand the mercy of God—that God willed the repentance of Nineveh, not its destruction.

Ancient Pharisaical Jews thought that the predictions against the nations must be fulfilled or God could not be a God of veracity and justice. So think some dogmaticians now. But God is a God of grace. God changes his decree of destruction even though men cannot reconcile such change with divine justice and veracity. God is sovereign in his justice as well as in his mercy. The doctrine that God must be just, but may or may not be merciful, is an error that has no basis in Holy Scripture or in a sound ethical philosophy. God is as truly, by necessity of the divine being, merciful as he is just. He is as free in his exercise of the one attribute as the other. He reserves the right to recall his messengers of wrath by the swifter angels of love.

Jonah represents only too well the Jew of Nehemiah's time, the Jew of the New Testament times, and also the Christian Church in its prevailing attitude to the heathen world. If the Roman Catholic Church had learned the lesson of Jonah, its theologians would not so generally have consigned the unbaptized heathen world to hell fire. If the Reformers had understood Jonah there would have been more of them than Zwingli and Coelius Secundus Curio, who thought that there were some redeemed heathen. If the Westminster divines had understood Jonah they never would have coined those remarkable statements of the tenth chapter of their Confession, in which the entire heathen world and their babes are left out of the election of grace. The present century, brought face to face with the heathen world, is beginning to learn the lesson of Jonah. Jonah is the book for our times. Though written many centuries ago as a beautiful ideal of the imagination to teach the wonderful grace of God in the salvation of repenting heathen and their babes, it has been reserved for the present age to apprehend and apply its wonderful lessons. The repentance of Nineveh is a prophetic ideal.

(II.) *The Book of Ruth* in our Bible is placed between Judges and Samuel, among the historical books. That was the arrangement in the Hellenistic canon, which mingled the apocryphal books with the books of the Palestinian canon. But in the

Rabbinical canon, which is based on an earlier arrangement, Ruth is placed in the third division, among the miscellaneous and later writings, chiefly poetical. The language of the book is tinged with Aramaic, making it probable that it was not written until after the exile. The book is written in prose with two little snatches of poetry. It has appended to it a genealogical table which did not belong to the original document. The story is a simple and graceful domestic story. It is a charming idyll.

(1.) The scene is put in the times of the Judges, but there is nothing to remind us of that time except certain antique customs which the author thinks it necessary to explain to his readers. There is nothing in the book that reminds us of the times of the Judges, as we see it depicted in the book of Judges. Deborah, Jael, and Jephthah's daughter were the appropriate heroines for that period. But Ruth seems altogether out of place in such rough times. No historian would think of writing such a domestic story as Ruth, as an episode in the history of such a period. Some have sought a reason in the fact that she was an ancestress of David. But there is nothing in the character of the monarchs of the Davidic dynasty that would lead us to suppose that they would encourage a writer to trace their descent from a poor and homeless Moabitess, however excellent her character. The book of Ruth stands by itself in the Hebrew canon of Holy Scripture as a separate writing, and it must be tested by itself without prejudice from the fact that it follows the book of Judges in the order of our canon. The scenery of the story is the time of the Judges, so far as the author's antiquarian knowledge goes; but it is an ideal picture of primitive simplicity and agricultural life in Bethlehem, separated from all that was gross and rude and rough in the real life of those times. The author invents the scenery for his actors and leaves out of it all that would mar its simplicity and detract from its main interest.

(2.) What then is the lesson of this idyll? It is given in the words of Ruth and the words of Boaz. Ruth says to Naomi (i., 16):

"Thy people shall be my people,
And thy God my God."

Boaz says to Ruth (ii., 12):

"May the Lord recompense thy doing,
And may thy reward be ample from the Lord God of Israel,
Under whose wings thou art come to take refuge."

The Moabitess had left her native land and her father's house, as did Abraham of old, and she sought refuge under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. This seeking refuge under the wings of the Lord is a favorite thought of the later psalmists. The exact words of Boaz are found elsewhere alone in the post-exilic ninety-first Psalm.

(3.) This story of Ruth and Boaz, the ancestors of David, is all the more striking that it comes into conflict with a law of Deuteronomy and its enforcement by Nehemiah. Deuteronomy gives this law: "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation shall *none belonging to them* enter into the assembly of the Lord forever" (xxiii., 3). This certainly excludes Ruth, a Moabitess of the first generation. Nehemiah enforced this law against women. He tells us: "In those days also I saw that the Jews had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, of Moab; and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves." (Neh. xiii., 23, seq.)

How shall we reconcile this story of Ruth and Boaz with the law of Deuteronomy, and the history of Nehemiah? Different theories have been proposed. We are reminded of another law of Deuteronomy (xxiii., 1) that the eunuch shall not enter into an assembly of the Lord. And yet the great prophet of the exile says: "For thus saith the Lord of the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and hold fast by my covenant. Unto them will I give in my house, and within my walls, a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters." (Is. lvi., 4-5.)

The book of Ruth and the great prophet of the exile take essentially the same position. They see that the grace of God to eunuchs and Moabites overrides legal precepts, and their zealous enforcement by painstaking magistrates. This seems to give a hint as to the time and purpose of the book of Ruth. It was written probably soon after the return from exile under Joshua and Zerubbabel, in the spirit of the great prophet of the exile,

to encourage Israelites to take advantage of the imperial decree and return to the Holy Land; and with the special purpose of encouraging those who had married foreign wives, and also the foreign widows of Israelites, to return with their children and seek refuge under the wings of the Lord in rebuilt Jerusalem.

The story is a prophet's story to set forth the doctrine that even a Moabitess would not be rejected by the grace of God. It is an Old Testament parallel to the Syro-Phœnician woman of the New Testament. Though she was a little dog in the estimation of the proud Israelite, she begged for the children's crumbs, lying under the table (Mark vii., 27-28), and she was not rejected. This Syro-Phœnician woman put to shame the mothers of Israel in the time of Jesus; so Ruth, though a Moabitess, is a model for Israel's daughters, and was chosen to be the ancestress of David and the Messiah.

(4.) Although we regard the book of Ruth as a work of the imagination, we do not deny that Ruth and Boaz were historical characters. The historic persons Ruth and Boaz and the events of their courtship and marriage were embellished by the imagination in order to set forth the great lessons of prophecy. Just as Zerubbabel was used in the apocryphal literature to set forth the lesson that truth is mightier than wine, women, and king, so Ruth is used to teach us that the grace of God pushes beyond the race of Abraham and redeems even the Moabitess for whom no provision was made in the law-code of Deuteronomy, or in the discipline of Nehemiah.

(III.) *The Book of Esther* is one of the miscellaneous writings of the Rabbinical canon. In the Hellenistic canon it is placed after the apocryphal pieces of fiction, called Tobit and Judith, as if recognized to be of the same type. The Greek Esther has a number of important insertions which were designed to remove some of the difficulties of the canonical Esther. Esther is not used in the New Testament, and has been regarded in all the centuries as the most doubtful of the biblical books. The language is one of the latest specimens of biblical Hebrew. The style is dramatic, and rapid in its development of incident. Scene after scene springs into place until the climax of difficulty is reached and the knot is tied so that it seems impossible to escape. Then it is untied with wondrous dexterity. All this is the art of the story-teller, and not the method of the historian. The things

which interest the historian are not in the book. Esther is a didactic story like Ruth and Jonah, Judith and Tobit, and it raises more historical difficulties than can easily be removed. The monarch seems to be Xerxes, the voluptuous and absolute ruler of the Persian empire. The story is one of court intrigue, in which Esther the favorite wife, and her uncle Mordecai, prevail over Haman, the prime minister. The book is connected with the Purim festival, and is supposed to give the historical account of its origin. This is denied by many modern scholars. It is held that Esther is a piece of historical fiction designed to set forth the importance of the Purim festival, as a national feast, and to teach the great lesson of patriotism. It does not by any means follow from the connection of the book with the feast, that the book is historical. Indeed Esther does not explain the Purim feast. It does not give any adequate reason why the Jews of Palestine and Egypt, and of the rest of the world, should celebrate a feast which, according to Esther, was connected with the deliverance of the Jews remaining in exile in the Persian empire, an event less worthy of commemoration than a hundred others. The feast of Purim, in all probability, had another origin than that reported in the story of Esther. Reuss suggests that the origin of the feast was in the victory of Judas the Maccabee over Nicanor, which was to be celebrated on the eighteenth of Adar, the day before the Purim feast of later times. Zunz, Hitzig and others trace the feast to the new year's feast of the Persians, which was appropriated by the Jews when they returned from exile and while they remained under the Persian rule. But it is not necessary to determine its exact origin. Many a Christian feast rests upon ancient unhistoric legends. We need but mention the feast of the Ascension of Mary, the feast of St. Veronica, the feast of the finding of the Cross, and the feast of the Sleepers.

(1.) There is no theology in the book of Esther. The name of God is not used at all, but the name of the Persian King occurs 187 times in 166 verses. Several theories have been suggested for the omission of the divine name. The most plausible one is that the book was to be read at a festival which in ancient times was marked by gross intoxication. A rabbi is said to have killed his friend at such a feast. God the next day raised him to life. The next year the rabbi invited his friend to celebrate the feast

with him again. The friend declined saying, "God does not work miracles every day." The name of God was not mentioned, according to this theory, for fear that it would be profaned. But might not a sacred book be profaned at such a time even if it did not contain the name of God? Moreover, the Greek additions to Esther use the divine name as freely as in other writings. There is in the Hebrew Esther no theology at all, and no religion, and therefore no occasion for the use of the divine name. One does not miss it unless his attention is called to the fact.

(2.) The morals of Esther are not of the highest order. The morals of the court of Persia are not in question; but the morals of Esther and Mordecai, the hero and heroine of the book, are in question. There is a spirit of revenge in the book that makes it very different from Jonah and Ruth, and the poets and psalmists of the exile and the restoration. Esther is praised for her beauty and tact, but she does not appear as a God-fearing damsel such as Ruth, and she lacks the high sense of honor of the Shulemite. She shares in the revengeful feelings and cruelty of Mordecai. Neither of them seems sensitive to virgin delicacy and womanly virtue. They are ready to sacrifice honor, as was Judith, in the interests of patriotism. One of the Greek additions endeavors to overcome the fault by the insertion of a prayer of Esther, in which she expresses her reluctance to be the paramour of the heathen monarch, and prays God for forgiveness in view of the necessities of the case.

(3.) The religion of the book is conspicuous also by absence. There is fasting, but it does not seem to have a pious motive. These defects are remedied to some extent in the Greek additions. There is no prayer for deliverance and no thanksgiving for it in the Hebrew text, but these are inserted in the Greek version. The one redeeming feature of the book is its patriotism. Esther and Mordecai are heroes of patriotic attachment to the interests of the Jews. For this they risk their honor and their lives. The same spirit is found in Judith, and in a measure in Nehemiah and Daniel. If patriotism is a virtue, and belongs to good morals in the Jewish and Christian systems, then the book has its place in the Bible, as teaching this virtue, even if everything else be absent. No book is so patriotic as the book of Esther. Esther is the heroine of patriotic devotion. She is the embodiment of Jewish nationality, and thus is the

appropriate theme of the great national festival of the Jews. And in all the Christian centuries Esther has been an inspiration to heroic women, and an incentive to deeds of daring for heroic men. And if, as many signs seem to indicate, woman in the next century is to use her great endowments in a larger measure for the advancement of the kingdom of God, Esther will exert a vaster influence in inspiring her to holy courage and unflinching devotion and service. For granting that patriotism in its narrower sense may be a form of selfishness, yet when patriotism has been transformed into an enthusiasm for humanity, and a passionate devotion to the kingdom of God, it then calls forth those wondrous energies of self-sacrifice with which woman seems to be more richly endowed than man.

Thus Hebrew literature presents us six great works of the imagination, inspired of God to set forth the ethical and religious principles of the Old Testament. Three of these are poetry—Job, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes; and three of these are prose—Ruth, Jonah, and Esther. Three of them present heroes for men, three of them heroines for women. Job, the chieftain, Jonah the prophet, and Koheleth the sage; Ruth the devout, Esther the patriotic, and the Shulemite, the loving, faithful virgin. They are the choicest products of the imagination. These beautiful forms of literary art are worthy of inspiration by the Spirit of God. They were neglected and misunderstood in the centuries when ecclesiasticism reigned, and so long as dogmatism crowded ethics from the field; but in these better and more hopeful times when the rich luscious fruits of holy conduct are appearing here and there as tokens of an abundant harvest, these masterpieces of the imagination of the ancient Hebrews are asserting their influence in the ethical elevation and moral inspiration of the men and women of our times.

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